



N.C. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE



YOUNG OFFENDERS FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAM | B.R.I.D.G.E.
BUILDING - REHABILITATING - INSTRUCTING - DEVELOPING - GROWING - EMPLOYING



ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT ON B.R.I.D.G.E.

October 1, 2018

Steve Troxler, Commissioner
Scott Bissette, Assistant Commissioner
David Lane, State Forester

Pursuant to SESSION LAW 2012-142 HOUSE BILL 950 PART XI, SECTION 11.1. (b), the North Carolina Forest Service, a division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, respectfully submits this annual report on the Young Offenders Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) for fiscal year 2018.

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STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

B.R.I.D.G.E. Young Offenders – priority and reporting

SECTION 11.1. (b) The North Carolina Forest Service shall submit an annual report on the Young Offenders Program (B.R.I.D.G.E.) no later than October 1 of each year beginning October 1, 2012, to the Fiscal Research Division, the Chairs of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural and Economic Resources and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Natural and Economic Resources, the Chairs of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Justice and Public Safety and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Justice and Public Safety, the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations, and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety. The report shall include the following information for the prior fiscal year:

- (1) The number of young offenders within the custody of the N.C. Department of Public Safety (DPS) Division of Adult Corrections (DAC) eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (2) The number of young offenders participating in B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (3) The average daily participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (4) The average duration of participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.
- (5) Summary of activities of B.R.I.D.G.E. participants.

OVERVIEW OF THE YOUNG OFFENDERS PROGRAM (B.R.I.D.G.E.)

The B.R.I.D.G.E. Program is a cooperative effort between the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) – Division of Adult Corrections (DAC). The program was created in response to the horrific 1985 fire season in which a single fire in Burke County destroyed approximately 5,000 acres and 27 homes. The 1986 North Carolina General Assembly funded the program to provide trained and readily-available crews for dispatch on wildfire suppression primarily to the counties of Western North Carolina.

Wildfire suppression is the primary goal of B.R.I.D.G.E. However, crewmen and the state benefit from this unique program in other ways. Crewmen are given opportunities to learn a variety of vocational skills and develop strong work ethics so that they may become productive members of society upon parole. Crewmen can also earn training certificates in wildland firefighting, acquire forklift operator licenses and enroll in light construction courses offered through Western Piedmont Community College. The state has realized a significant return on its investment in the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program. Crews assist with projects including trail maintenance and construction, painting and sandblasting, forest management, electrical work, natural disaster assistance, aiding the NCFS nursery program, as well as providing direct

services to residents by completing various work projects for state, county and local government agencies, in addition to schools and non-profit organizations.

The state has also benefited from lower costs and recidivism rates because of the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program. A B.R.I.D.G.E. crewman earns 12.5 cents per hour in comparison to an emergency pick-up firefighter at \$11.48 per hour. A five-person B.R.I.D.G.E. crew only costs the state \$5.00 per eight-hour shift, compared to \$459.20 for a five-person crew of emergency pickup firefighters. The Western North Carolina RSMeans average general laborer contractor rate is \$12.68 per hour, which equals a savings of 99 percent if a B.R.I.D.G.E. crewmen is used. Finally, a 2008 unofficial study of recidivism showed that only 7.3 percent of B.R.I.D.G.E. inmates returned to prison compared to the state average of 37.5 percent.

A total of 73 inmate positions are obtained from Caldwell Correctional Center, Craggy Correctional Center, Foothills Correctional Institution and Marion Correctional Institution.

SUMMARY OF B.R.I.D.G.E. DATA FOR FY 2017-18

The number of young offenders eligible

Table 1. Inmates available by facility in N.C. Department of Public Safety custody eligible for participation in B.R.I.D.G.E.

FACILITY	NUMBER OF INMATES
Caldwell Minimum Custody Correctional Center	1
Foothills Minimum Custody Correctional Institution	4
Marion Minimum Custody Correctional Institution	0
All other State Correctional facilities	611
Total number of young offenders within the custody of the Division of Adult Correction eligible for B.R.I.D.G.E. between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018	616

Data source: N.C. Department of Public Safety, Office of Research & Planning

Crewmen eligibility is determined based on standards provided by the B.R.I.D.G.E. Program. Standards include: (1) 18 to 32 years old; (2) No sexual offenders; (3) Inmates who have been sentenced for serious assaultive crimes will be referred to the Facility Classification Committee (FCC) for review. For purpose of this policy, serious assaults are defined as assaults that are predatory and resulted in injury. The FCC will review, make a recommendation and then forward to the appropriate staff for final disposition; (4) Activity Grade 1 and Grade 2 subject to approval by medical

authority; (5) Minimum custody, Level 1; (6) No escape attempts in past 12 months; (7) Minimum sentence remainder length one-three months from approval; (8) Acceptable to both NCFS and DAC; (9) Final approval authority will be the Unit Manager, Program Director and an appointed staff member in a higher classification; (10) Inmate must have remained infraction free for 30 days prior to assignment. Waivers of this rule may be requested on a case by case basis.

A thorough case review of the inmate's behavior, abilities and crime details may result in an exception of the standard criteria. Reviews are conducted on a per case basis. Consequently, there is no definitive way to determine whether all inmates in the above data will be approved for the program.

The number of young offenders participating in B.R.I.D.G.E.

In fiscal year 2018, 178 crewmen participated for various durations¹ in the B.R.I.D.G.E. program.

Average daily participation

Daily participation in B.R.I.D.G.E. is 58 crewmen².

Average duration of participation

The average duration of participation in B.R.I.D.G.E. is 201 days³ per crewman.

Summary of activities of B.R.I.D.G.E. participants

- 82,658 total work hours
- Wildland fire control – 20,527 hours includes fire control skills, direct fire suppression, pre-fire firebreak construction and prescribed hazard reduction burn; does not include chainsaw and disaster relief hours
- Construction repair and maintenance – including carpentry, painting and equipment maintenance
- Projects to support search and rescue training and fisheries stocking
- Nursery and tree improvement – projects such as seed collection, seedling lifting, chainsaw work, timber stand improvement, and trail maintenance

¹ Determined by taking the total number of inmates assigned to B.R.I.D.G.E. as of July 1, 2018, plus the total number of inmates who entered the program from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

² Determined by taking daily inmate totals from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 divided by total calendar days. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

³ Determined by taking total participation days by crewmen who have been released prior to June 30, 2018. Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

- Education – crewmen receive training in carpentry and constructions skills, forklift operation, ATV, chipper, mower, chainsaw and other small equipment operations
- Community Service – litter sweep assigned areas and disaster relief

EXAMPLE B.R.I.D.G.E. PROJECTS

Example of emergency response efforts

Thoroughly trained and readily available B.R.I.D.G.E. crews assisted in disaster recovery activities following tornados and flooding in Western North Carolina. These crews responded to N.C. Emergency Management requests for individual and public assistance.

In October 2017, Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Wilkes counties were hit by two tornados leaving a broad path of destruction. B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were quickly dispatched to clear roads that were blocked by downed trees and debris impeding all emergency vehicle passage. Response efforts totaled 1,535 work-hours over a three-week period.

During May and June 2018, several counties in Western North Carolina were significantly affected by heavy rains and flooding primarily attributed to Tropical Storm Alberto. Some individuals of the public population in those counties were determined to have preexisting medical conditions that would likely require immediate access to medical facilities. Crews were dispatched to build foot bridges for these victims that lost access to main roads. Multiple bridges were constructed in several counties over a three-week period totaling 1,349 work-hours.

The aforementioned emergency response total work-hours of 2,884 at a rate of \$0.125 per hour, equal a meager \$360.50 cost when utilizing inmates.

Examples of work projects

B.R.I.D.G.E. crews were dispatched to the Linville River Nursery and many Western North Carolina counties for nursery operation tasks and seed collection. Crews planted and lifted seedlings, as well as performed multiple maintenance functions. This operation not only provided inmates with valuable job training, work ethics and essential life skills through the 3,654 work-hours contributed, it was also a significant cost savings for the state.

Table 2. B.R.I.D.G.E. crew project types and hours, FY18

Work Project Types	Project Hours
Community Service Projects	3,547
Construction/Repair/Maintenance Projects	33,622
Fire Control Projects / Disaster Relief	30,097
Nursery and Tree Improvement Projects	3,654
Other Projects	188
Training Projects	11,550
Total	82,658

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews assisted 133 different agencies and organizations during the fiscal year such as Claridge Nursery, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, DuPont State Recreational Forest, N.C. State Parks, various emergency management and volunteer fire departments, as well as city and county governments.

Table 3. Types of agencies assisted by B.R.I.D.G.E. participants in FY18

Agency Type	Project Hours
Civic/Non-Profit Groups	6,510
Federal Government	2,408
Local Government	8,989
N.C. Forest Service	47,939
Other State Agencies	16,324
Schools	488
Total	82,658

Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

B.R.I.D.G.E. Crews worked on projects in 31 counties from Cherokee County to Wake County.

Table 4. B.R.I.D.G.E. project locations in FY18

County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours	County	Project Hours
Alexander	1,011	Henderson	5,656	Stanley	24
Ashe	1,011	Iredell	787	Stokes	344
Avery	9,727	Jackson	1,180	Surry	54
Buncombe	6,561	Lincoln	80	Swain	592
Burke	23,111	Macon	732	Transylvania	2,448
Burke/Caldwell	734	Madison	957	Wake	1,727

Caldwell	2,586	McDowell	3,382	Wilkes	3,631
Cherokee	798	Mitchell	1,446	Yadkin	40
Clay	40	Mitchell/Rutherford	792	Yancey	1,619
Gaston	1,364	Pender	95	Multi-County	9,487
Graham	266	Polk	140		
Haywood	100	Rutherford	136		

Data source: NCFS B.R.I.D.G.E.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information about the B.R.I.D.G.E. program, please contact:

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